

February 18, 2013

Michael Crutchley

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To whom it may concern:

My name is Michael Crutchley, and I'm writing to you to share my thoughts concerning the evaluations being made for funding for conservation programs in the State of Connecticut. I live in a rural area in Southeastern Connecticut, home to many conservation areas, as well as Pachaug State Forest. As a runner, and specifically a trail runner, I am repeatedly humbled by the beauty of the forests that are in my own backyard. I have been introducing my friends to the trails within the Forest, and we spend a great deal of time running and hiking there.

Because I felt the need to give back, I decided to volunteer as a trail manager and help maintain the blue-blazed trails that I spend so much time on. The CFPA voted me in a few months ago as the Trail Manager of the western 7 miles of the Narragansett Trail, and I spend time on the trail making sure that it's clear and well-marked. The views from the highest elevations of the trail are incredible. On clear days, from over 15 miles inland, you can see the ocean, Block Island, and even Long Island. On other parts of the trail, incredible rock formations, streams, and even an active beaver lodge can be seen and enjoyed. I also lead group runs there, and will be hosting a trail run/walk in June on a section of the trail I manage, as part of the Connecticut Trails Day Weekend.

The point I'd like to make is this: I, like many others around the state and like so many others before us, understand how important our State Parks are to the residents of CT and visitors from all over. For that reason, we volunteer our time, knowing that if we didn't, things as simple as hiking trails would become overgrown and disappear. I understand that times are hard and funding is difficult, but a resource as valuable as our State Parks should not go away due to the lack of funds to properly staff and maintain them. We volunteer, with the understanding that there needs to be staff to a certain point, but that volunteers are still needed. There needs to be a staff presence at the parks though, at the very least for public safety, maintenance, and informational purposes.

The Parks provide a 100% positive, healthy environment for families, and are accessible to everyone. In a time when we're trying to promote healthy living, especially for our kids, the State Parks provide that. To consider taking away funding for the Parks sends the message that being outdoors enjoying nature is just not that high on our priorities as a state, and would set a very bad precedent for the state of healthy living in Connecticut. In addition, this is the 100th anniversary of the State Park system. This should be the time to allocate more funds, not less, to the State Parks and make 2013 a celebration statewide of

what I'd argue is one of our greatest resources. If 8 million people visit our State Parks each year, imagine how many more would come if we promoted them as a destination, and showed our support for keeping them properly maintained and staffed?

I hope you agree, and continue to keep our Parks alive and well for future generations.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Crutchley